

APHIS, Plant Protection and Quarantine
Multiple Locations

Risk Assessment Specialist

INTRODUCTION

The incumbent serves as expert for all risk assessment and risk management functions. Risk assessment is the statistical evaluation of pathways and risk management or mitigation is what can be done to reduce the risk. The position coordinates the conduct of PPQ's integrated risk analysis system throughout a large geographical or large populace areas.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Incumbent serves a point of contact and expert for PPQ programs in the development and maintenance of risk assessment (e.g., the estimation of the likelihood and magnitude of an adverse event) and risk management (e.g., what is done to control an adverse event) activities. An adverse event is defined as the occurrence of harmful impact to U.S. Plant resources and environs stemming from exotic animal/plant pests and diseases, significant domestic plant pest/disease outbreaks or the incursion of harmful invasive plant species.

Incumbent reviews and recommends practices to ensure there is a risk-based approach and a balanced organizational perspective on pest/disease threats, relative to program needs, staffing and workload. Assists management in analyzing, characterizing, comparing and regulating risk factors to ensure expeditious management of phytosanitary certificates and compliance with international trade obligations and standards.

Conducts risk management program reviews utilizing qualitative and quantitative techniques in order to ensure effective risk-based work methods and organizational standards for quality are being met. Develops methodologies (e.g., re-engineering passenger flow, outreach, surveys) to encourage voluntary public compliance and ensures fairness in applying direct regulatory actions for minimizing or thwarting risk incidents. Develops processes and protocols acceptable to the community for management of risk elements. Ensures consideration of public impact is a factor all risk management activities.

Incumbent develops processes and procedures to enhance consistency in the application of risk management principles and to ensure they are applied appropriately.

Incumbent will participate in and/or chair local risk management committees.

Incumbent applies scientific methods of decision-making utilizing a participatory science-based risk analysis system that incorporates employee, managerial and public interactions.

Evaluates the organization's effective delivery of domestic program activities, consistent with broad parameters established by management. Utilizes and conducts the performance of various

surveys, e.g., Exotic Pest Detection Survey), regulatory and control methodologies to suppress, eradicate or minimize spread of certain known pest populations in conjunction with established program operations.

Uses AQI monitoring and evaluation concepts, compliance concepts and knowledge of inspection methods, to develop, recommend, and aid implementation of new procedures and/or modification of new methods and regulations as needed for the success of program operations.

Prepares written communications and delivers training to a variety of audiences in both “plain language” and technical documents.

Assists PPQ management in the review of documents, proposals, draft regulations, guidelines and procedures prepared by headquarters, regional staff or others, and coordinates program’s response for consideration by regional management. This may include further dissemination of related documents, proposals and drafts within area of responsibility and the analysis, assembly, consolidation, edits and summary of all views to finalize responses.

Participates in port and state meetings and shares findings of analyses. Takes appropriate follow-up action to secure answers to questions and resolves information problems addressed at meetings. As required, organizes and develops agendas for monthly conference calls. Conducts regular telephone conversations with representatives from PPQ field and state and regional offices to gather information, communicate the progress, recommend redirection, or resolve problems critical to the success of program operations.

FACTOR LEVELS

1. **Knowledge Required:** Knowledge of risk assessment methodologies to evaluate various pest risk pathways. Technical expertise sufficient to develop, propose and recommend substantial Program or regional program innovations, significant Program changes, or alternate courses of critical management action, and skill in applying recent advances and research findings to adjustments in Program plans.

Knowledge of botany, entomology, plant pathology and other agriculturally related sciences; transportation patterns and practices; and farming/ranching and nursery practices to resolve or recommend resolution to technical problems.

Knowledge of risk-based approaches to problem solving in order to design surveys.

Knowledge of PPQ-related laws, policies, regulations, techniques and practices to enable the incumbent to adapt to sensitive and difficult situations; provide advice to Officers on technical issues; and formulate recommendations for agency actions.

2. **Supervisory Controls:** This position is under the direction of the State Plant Health Director with program oversight and work direction by the Regional Program Manager. The incumbent works independently in designing the program projects; determining their order and priority; and

making any changes as required by circumstances. Technical recommendations are normally accepted without significant change. Work is reviewed in terms of meeting program objectives; for effectiveness in resolving programmatic deficiencies; and for appropriate coordination among vested parties.

3. Guidelines: Guidelines are accepted principles, theories, and methodologies of management and program analysis, measurement techniques, program evaluation, and research as well as Federal, APHIS, PPQ laws, regulations, directives, manuals, joint memoranda of understanding, scientific and technical literature, cooperative agreements, policies and procedures.

The incumbent may need to adapt policies and procedures to resolve operational problems and issues within the framework of existing guidelines. The incumbent interprets and applies guidelines to a variety of situations and problems, adapting and extending guidelines where there are gaps in coverage or when information is unclear, therefore setting new precedents.

The incumbent uses judgment to decide approaches, resolve specific problems, provide technical advice and information to customers; and consults with senior specialist or supervisory personnel in precedent-setting situations. The incumbent may need to devise new guidelines, methods, and policies, using current authority in areas outside the control and framework of traditional ports of entry.

4. Complexity: The work involves gathering information, identifying and analyzing issues, and developing recommendations to resolve substantive problems relating to resource allocation, program operations targeting for AQI. This requires an understanding of the interrelationships between various segments of the safeguarding continuum, including inspection, certification, and compliance activities; import/export trade considerations; and risk analysis. The incumbent has considerable responsibility in one-on-one contact with APHIS employees and external customers. Works with other port, state and regional analysts and makes recommendations which sometimes necessitate immediate action, which may affect state, regional and/or national operational procedures or policies. The incumbent develops both long- and short-range planning and implementation strategies.

5. Scope and Effect: The incumbent's activities integrally affect how the agency conducts business. The work involves operational planning and guidance to ensure: (1) the Agency's ability to safeguard U.S. Plant resources from invasive plants and pests; (2) expeditious and secure admission of an increasing volume of goods and passengers into the United States; and (3) facilitation of agricultural trade in compliance with international obligations and standards. Successful risk management programs, in support of these goals, prevent serious economic hardship or deleterious trade impact resulting from exotic pests, disease or invasive species outbreaks. These outbreaks can cause significant agricultural, plant resource and (subsequent) economic loss. Because of the potentially controversial nature of the incumbent's work, actions may be subject to legal scrutiny and challenge. The employee's adherence to agency policy and procedure is therefore essential to protect the interests of the agency against lawsuits, complaints and unfavorable media coverage.

6. Personal Contacts: Responsibilities require frequent contacts with PPQ staff including Officers, supervisors and program management officials. Regular contacts are also with officials of other federal agencies, state agencies, local government entities, cooperators and the public.

7. Purpose of Contacts: The contacts are established to develop cooperative relations; to plan and coordinate professional activities; and to enforce and explain regulations. Contacts during risk management, regulatory survey and control activities are usually cooperative in nature. Incumbent may, however, occasionally encounter obstruction of activities from restraint or uniformed public.

8. Physical Demands: Moderate to heavy physical demands are an inherent part of the job. Long periods of walking, frequent bending, stooping and crawling through confined spaces is required. Loading, unloading and carrying of moderately heavy materials is sometimes necessary. The incumbent must also be able to drive a motor vehicle - - sometimes for extended periods of time.

9. Work Environment: Work takes place in offices, various port environs, industrial locations, and a variety of other outdoor locations. Some activities occur in isolated rural areas. Employees may experience discomfort due to temperature extremes, high noise levels, toxic fumes and hazardous materials.